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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **IHCDA Launches Pilot Program for Improved Access to Social Security Benefits in Two Indiana Communities**

The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) recently launched an innovative new pilot program in two Indiana communities, Jeffersonville and Indianapolis, to help homeless Hoosiers gain improved access to Social Security benefits, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The state of Indiana was selected by a national steering committee to participate in the second wave of the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery Initiative (SOAR) pilot program.

“Improving homeless Hoosiers’ access to Social Security benefits is an important step toward helping these vulnerable citizens overcome their challenges,” said Lt. Governor Skillman, who chairs the IHCDA Board of Directors. “The state remains committed to helping all Hoosiers and I look forward to seeing successful results at the end of SOAR’s pilot program.”

A two-day summit sponsored by IHCDA prepared social workers and case managers from Jeffersonville and Indianapolis to develop action plans for their respective cities. These plans will be set in motion by the planning teams and monitored by IHCDA for the next year.

“This program is important to IHCDA because it is often difficult for homeless Hoosiers to receive critical disability benefits. By improving access to these benefits, more homeless individuals will increase their chances of recovery and improve their ability to secure employment,” said Sherry Seiwert, executive director of IHCDA.

Yvonne Perret, a social worker and homeless advocate from Massachusetts, developed the SOAR program. “SOAR works for two reasons: collaboration and cooperation,” Perret said. “Through the streamlined process we increase communication between the main players involved in securing SSI benefits. We equip the case managers with the tools they need to intervene in the process where there are problems.” The Massachusetts project received a Best Practice Award from the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Only about 10 percent to 15 percent of applicants get access to Social Security benefits on their initial application. The process can take up to a year to complete, and is often followed by a series of appeals if the benefits are not granted. Under this new program, the expected results will be at least a 75 percent increase in initial benefits approvals and a shortening of the review process to 90 days.

“Aside from the obvious benefit of getting approvals to more people in a much shorter time frame, by streamlining the processes and avoiding costly appeals, the program has the potential to save the state millions of dollars in recouped Medicaid and other assistance,” said Charles Coley, homeless liaison for IHCDA and the agency’s facilitator for the pilot program. “We are very excited about what this can do for the people of Indiana.”

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*The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority’s (IHCDA) mission is for every Hoosier to have the opportunity to live in safe, affordable, good-quality housing in economically stable communities. IHCDA believes that growing Indiana’s economy starts at home. For more information go to [www.indianahousing.org](http://www.indianahousing.org)*